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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine how effective was the Communications Program in providing special assistance to students who were experiencing serious difficulty with the English language. Forty-eight students were used in the experimental group at Britannia Secondary School and a further twenty-six students from Templeton Secondary School formed the control group. Most of the students participating were originally from Hong Kong. Pre- and post-tests were given in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The staff and students involved also gave their opinions of the service being provided by the special program. A statistical "t" test was made on the mean-gain scores in each skill area to ascertain if there were significant differences between the experimental and the control groups. The analysis of covariance was also applied to the mean-gain scores in reading. The results indicated that the Communications Program was having a beneficial effect on the development of positive attitudes towards learning among the students concerned. Sound growth in most of the English language skills was also obtained. A number of recommendations were made relating to the Communications Program and further studies of this nature. (Author)

RESEARCH REPORT

PETER EDWARDS

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An Evaluation of the Communications Program for English Second-Language Students at Britannia Secondary School.

JULY, 1973

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DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND EVALUATION
BOARD OF SCHOOL TRUSTEES
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- Mr. N. H. Brown, the principal of Britannia Secondary School, and
- other staff involved in the program.

All pictures in the report were taken by Marjean Borjesson, the Vancouver School Board's photographer.

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Pre- and post-tests were given in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The staff and students involved also gave their opinions of the service being provided by the special program. A statistical "t" test was made on the mean-gain scores in each skill area to ascertain if there were significant differences between the experimental and the control groups. The analysis of covariance was also applied to the mean-gain scores in reading.

The results indicated that the Communications Program was having a beneficial effect on the development of positive attitudes towards learning among the students concerned. Sound growth in most of the English language skills was also obtained.

A number of recommendations were made relating to the Communications Program and further studies of this nature.

AN EVALUATION OF THE COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAM FOR ENGLISH SECOND - LANGUAGE STUDENTS AT BRITANNIA SECONDARY SCHOOL

I. INTRODUCTION

Background

In 1969, a special English program was introduced at Britannia Secondary School. The program was designed for students who were seriously deficient in basic English language skills. The Communications Program, as the new course was termed, catered mainly to the large numbers of Asian students who were enrolled at the school. The program was started by Mrs. Susan Jones and later she was joined by Mrs. Nellie Yu, who today is the coordinator of the program. (See Figure 1)

Mrs. Nellie Yu and Students.

The Communications Program was initially presented as an alternative to the regular English program. However, when a semester system was adopted at the school in September 1971, the English Department at Britannia Secondary School decided that students who were deficient in basic English language skills should take a program known as English Communications (En. C.) during the first semester, plus the regular English (En) course in the following semester. The English Communications program was to be a prerequisite for the regular English course. (See Figure 2).

[N. B. Throughout the report, the term, "English Communications classes", will refer to classes in the Communications Program.]

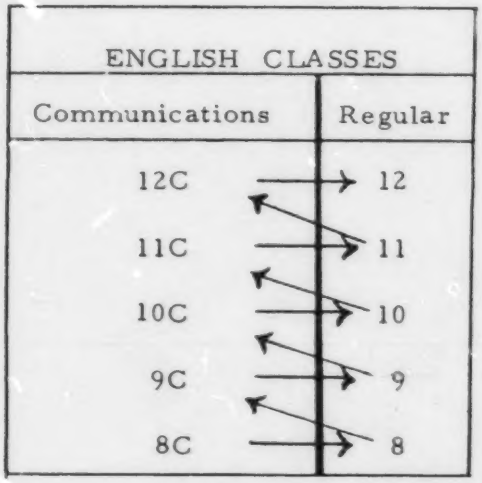


FIGURE 2: PROGRAM FOR A STUDENT REQUIRING ALL ENGLISH COMMUNICATIONS CLASSES AND ALL REGULAR ENGLISH CLASSES.

There were several alternatives possible in the arrangement outlined in Figure 2.

1. Some of the weaker students could stay in English Communications classes (at the same level) for a second semester.

2. Some students could move to regular English and continue to progress 'vertically' through the program without returning to a semester of English Communications. (See Figure 3)

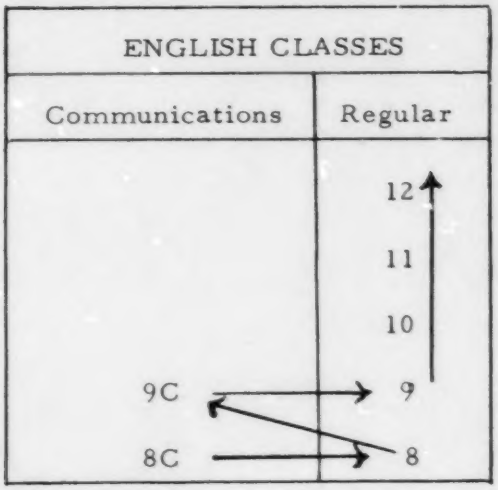
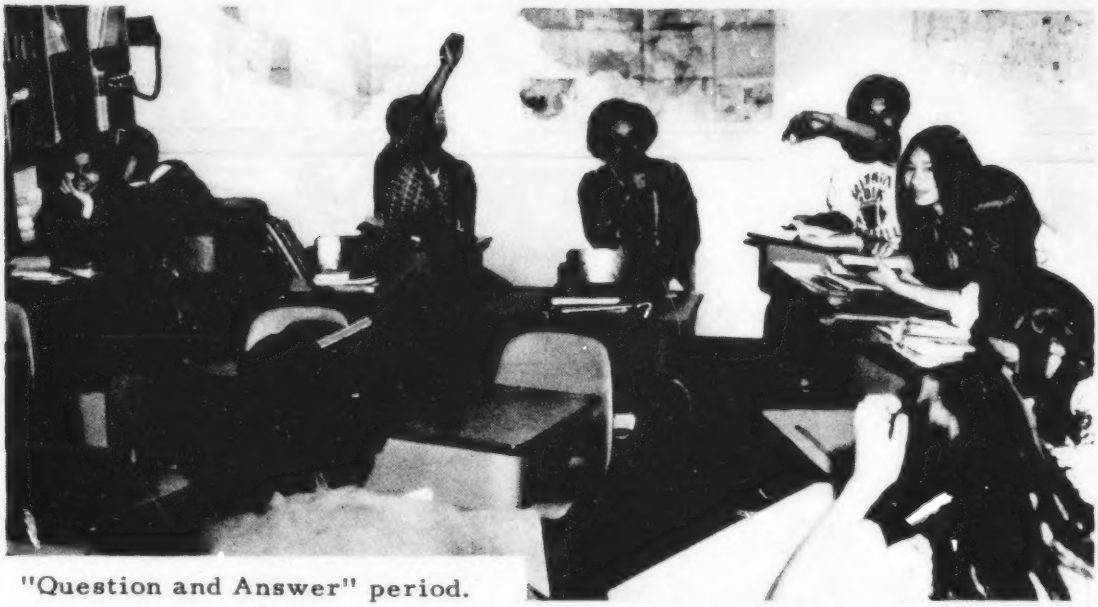


FIGURE 3: PROGRAM FOR A STUDENT NOT REQUIRING ANY FURTHER ENGLISH COMMUNICATIONS CLASSES AFTER GRADE 9.

The Problem and Its Significance

English Communications at Britannia Secondary School offered instruction in listening, speaking, reading and writing skills for students from Grade 8 through Grade 12. (See Figure 4)



"Question and Answer" period.

Most of the participants in the program were Chinese students from Hong Kong. They had either recently arrived in Canada or came from homes where Chinese continued to be the main language used. (See Figure 5)

"Learning the Language"

Mrs. Yu has pointed to the basic problem involved in this study:

> 'Asian immigrants find it much harder to learn English than European immigrants, as their language and culture are totally different. These (Asian) students are between fourteen and twenty, at an age which makes learning a new language even harder as there is more to learn and more to unlearn, plus the fact that the muscles in their speech organs are set. A few of them have been to ... English schools in Hong Kong, but ..... their knowledge of English is practically nil.' (Yu, 1973)

The questions was therefore posed: Are the students in English Communications classes benefitting from the special program which has been designed to meet their needs?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the Communications Program at Britannia Secondary School in order to provide information pertaining to the following questions:

1. How effective was the program in improving the English of New Canadian students?

2. Had the program contributed to the success of students in other school subjects?

3. What was available from the Communications Program that was different to other programs offered by schools that also had New Canadian students at the secondary level?

Because of the broad nature of the first question it was decided to add a fourth area of investigation.

4. What was the growth in the listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities of the students involved in the Communications Program?

Limitations

1. The findings from the study can be applied only to the students involved in the Communications Program at Britannia Secondary School.

2. No attempt was made to analyze the instructional materials being used or to assess the teaching techniques being employed in the program.

3. The use of another school to supply the control group may have introduced uncontrolled variables into the study. The nature of instruction being given the control group was not investigated in detail.

4. Attitudinal changes in student behaviour were not included in the testing program but were reported informally by staff and students.

5. Point #3 in the Purpose of the Study which was to investigate what was available from the Communications Program that was different to other programs for New Canadian students, was not carried out owing to considerations of time and personnel available.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The Student's Needs

The need for non-English speaking immigrant children to receive special help in the learning of English has been well documented. Stoddart (1968) states that immigrant children need an understanding of English so that they can cope with everyday life and also be able to continue with their education. Stoddart points out that there are decreasing opportunities for non-English speaking students to learn English environmentally once they enter high school and that the situation is exacerbated if English is not spoken in the home. As the Asian students in the Britannia Communications Program are between the ages of fourteen and twenty years, there is an urgent need for them to become proficient in English both from a social and an academic point of view.

Culturally disadvantaged children have been classified by Miller (1969) as lacking in 'the proper amount of physical stimuli' and as being denied the 'opportunity to engage in many first hand and vicarious experiences'. Certainly these restrictions would apply to many of the Britannia students in the Communications Program. Miller emphasizes the importance of the teacher's attitude in helping the disadvantaged student, plus the need to offer the student numerous opportunities to engage successfully in the learning process. Black (1970) listed cultural readiness, language readiness, and family support for education as the three basic needs of the disadvantaged child. Language differences and their relationship to reading were developed by Berg (1969), who stressed the importance of reading in helping a child to adapt more readily to the learning environment. The emphasis on all aspects of English language development through a language experience approach was suggested as the best method.

The Diagnostic Approach

Careful diagnostic procedures to identify causal factors of reading disabilities and then plan for their removal is an essential first step in treating the disabled reader (Carter 1970). Reading diagnosis is concerned with the analysis of three factors according to Farr (1971). He talks of (a) stating what the student is expected to read; (b) learning how the student goes about his or her tasks, and (c) discovering the best ways of helping the student overcome the problem. Of particular relevance to the Britannia Communications project is Farr's comment that attention must be given to what the student needs to read and what he or she can now read.

The Teacher

The role of the teacher in working with English second-language students takes on special significance. Rivers (1968) posed the rhetorical question "Can the teaching of English as a second language in school be justified?"

Rivers answered her question in the affirmative and emphasized that the main issue was concerned with how much the English language training contributed to the total educational experience of the student. According to Rivers, the special program to assist the culturally disadvantaged student should be superior to the normal routine of instruction. Senior (1967) pointed out that children of another cultural background often are very sensitive to negative attitudes shown towards them by school personnel. When this happens the students retaliate with 'hostility, absenteeism, and failure'. Anthony (1972) insisted that the success of special techniques to help youngsters acquire English as a second language depends to a large extent on the teacher's over-all ability to cope with the situation.

The Skills Needed

Recent writings on the types of skills needed by culturally disadvantaged students have continued to stress listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Robinett 1967). Finocchiaro (1969) stated that it will only be when English second-language learners can come to school with a feeling of success and pleasure that we can hope to make their integration into society a smooth one. This feeling of well-being and social acceptance will be largely contingent on the student's facility to communicate in English.

Instructional Materials

There are a number of research articles dealing with the use of instructional methods and materials for culturally disadvantaged students. Krippner (1966) outlined ten different programs and stressed the importance of individual attention, interesting manipulative materials, and the teacher's role in guiding the student to greater achievement. Edwards (1967) advocated 'action-programs' and related experimental research where adverse learning conditions were identified and remediated. A major work by Spache (1970) outlined the steps a teacher could take to help improve reading instruction among culturally disadvantaged minority groups. A section with specific instructional materials for Orientals may be of special interest for the Britannia Communications project.

III. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A non-equivalent control group design as outlined by Campbell and Stanley (1969) was chosen for the study. (See Figure 6)

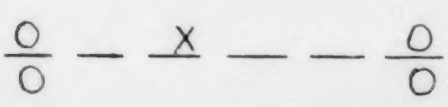


FIGURE 6: A NON-EQUIVALENT CONTROL GROUP DESIGN.

O = observation or measurement,
X = the experimental variable or treatment
— — — = the groups were not equated by random assignment .

The design was chosen because the groups were not randomly selected and because the control group was from a different school. It was felt, however, that the non-equivalent control group design would control the main effects of history, maturation, testing, and instrumentation, as both experimental and control groups were composed mainly of Asian students from Hong Kong who were deficient in basic English language skills.

Subjects

A total of seventy-four students were used in the study. The experimental group consisted for forty-eight students from Britannia Secondary School and there were twenty-six Templeton Secondary School students in the control group. The vast majority of the students were Chinese and two-thirds of them were male. (See Figure 7)

An English Communications class at work.

The students came from grades eight to twelve. They had either volunteered to take the course or had been selected to do so by their teachers on the basis of their lack of proficiency in basic English language skills.

Instruments

Two standardized tests were used to measure reading and listening ability respectively. The Gates - MacGinitie Reading Test, Survey D, Forms 1M and 2M was used for the pre- and post-tests in reading. The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Forms A and B, specially modified for group testing, was used to measure listening ability.

The spoken English and written English skills were individually rated by the teachers taking part in the study. A five-point scale ranging from a low of 1 to a high of 5 was used and the results were checked by an independent panel of judges at the Vancouver School Board. The students

were able to choose a topic for the written exercise from a number of topics (see Appendix A) and in the Oral English test the students spoke for several minutes about a picture which they had selected from a number available.

Procedure

The background information of each student was recorded on a "Student Survey" sheet (see Appendix B) at the commencement of the study. The listening and reading tests were administered to the experimental and control groups by examiners from the School Board Office. In the case of the test of listening abilities the following procedure was used. One examiner placed a transparency of each page of the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (which contained four separate pictures) on an overhead projector at a steady rate while a second examiner called out the cue word. The students were told to mark the letter (A, B, C, or D) on their answer sheet, of the picture which corresponded to the word being dictated. The test was commenced at item twenty and concluded at item one hundred.

The reading test was administered according to standard procedures set out in the Teacher's Manual of the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test.

The written English test was given by the classroom teacher concerned. Twenty students were randomly selected from the experimental group and were asked to write a passage on a topic of their choice (See Appendix A). The teacher then rated the student's work on a five-point scale which ranged from a low of 1 to a high of 5.

Teachers involved in the study also administered the Oral English test. (See Appendix C). The same twenty students from the experimental group were asked to speak for several minutes about a picture which they had selected. Their oral expression was recorded on a cassette tape and then assessed by the teacher using a five-point scale identical to the one used in the written expression evaluation.

The results of the spoken and written English tests were checked by two independent judges at the Vancouver School Board office.

The pre-testing was administered in early February, 1973 and the post-tests were given at the beginning of June, 1973. All results were recorded and prepared for analysis and evaluation.

Statistical Procedures

A statistical "t" test was made on the gain scores recorded by the experimental and control groups for each of the sub-tests (Speed and Accuracy, Vocabulary, Comprehension) plus the total reading score of the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test. The gain scores from the pre- to post-test on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test were treated in a similar manner. The analysis of covariance was also conducted with the gain scores in reading using the pre-test scores of the P. P. V. T. as the covariate.

IV. RESULTS

A. Academic Findings

Listening

The results of the statistical "t" test performed on the data from the listening test are presented in TABLE I.

TABLE I: ANALYSIS BY "t" TEST OF GAINS MADE ON THE PEABODY PICTURE VOCABULARY TEST BY NEW CANADIAN STUDENTS IN THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP AT BRITANNIA SECONDARY SCHOOL AND IN THE CONTROL GROUP AT TEMPLETON SECONDARY SCHOOL.

	PEABODY PICTURE VOCABULARY TEST	
	Experimental	Control
Number of Students	48	26
Pre-Test Mean	54.8	63.0
Post-Test Mean	52.2	63.2
Mean Gain	-2.6	0.2
Standard Deviation	6.8	6.5
Difference Between Means	-2.8	
"t" Value	1.77 (n.s.d.)	

Legend: (n.s.d.) -- no significant difference

The analysis revealed that the control group had shown a mean gain between pre- and post- tests (0.2) but that the experimental group had recorded a loss (-2.6). As a result the "t" value of 1.77 indicated that there was no significant difference between the two groups in listening skill as measured by the test.

The negative result achieved by the experimental group in 'mean gain' for the listening test is difficult to explain. Only sixteen of the forty-eight students recorded a positive result. In addition, five male students showed a decline in their raw scores of -11, -12, -12, -14, and -20, respectively. The writer felt that the English Communications students were under more pressure to achieve well in the large group test situations. This may have led to a negative attitude in some of the students towards the end of the school year.

Reading

Table II presents the results of the statistical "t" test performed on the data from the various subskills of the reading test.

TABLE II: ANALYSES BY "t" TEST OF GAINS MADE ON THE GATES-MACGINITIE READING TEST BY NEW CANADIAN STUDENTS IN THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP AT BRITANNIA SECONDARY SCHOOL AND IN THE CONTROL GROUP AT TEMPLETON SECONDARY SCHOOL.

	Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test, Survey D			
	Speed and Accuracy		Vocabulary	
	Experimental	Control	Experimental	Control
Number of Students	54	26	54	26
Pre-Test Mean	18.7	22.3	23.7	34.5
Post-Test Mean	20.8	25.8	24.4	35.1
Mean Gain	2.1	3.5	0.7	0.6
Standard Deviation	6.9	3.9	5.2	3.3
Difference Between Means	-1.4		0.1	
"t" Value	1.16 (n.s.d)		0.09(n.s.d	

	Gates MacGinitie Reading Test, Survey D			
	Comprehension		Total Test	
	Experimental	Control	Experimental	Control
Number of Students	54	26	54	26
Pre-Test Mean	30.1	42.8	72.5	99.6
Post-Test Mean	32.8	43.0	78.0	103.9
Mean Gain	2.7	0.2	5.5	4.3
Standard Deviation	5.7	3.4	8.1	7.1
Difference Between Means	2.5		1.2	
"t" Value	2.42*		0.65 (n.s.d)	

Legend: (n.s.d.) -- no significant difference
* -- significant at the .05 level

Gains in the mean score from February to June were made by both the experimental and the control groups in all aspects of the test, but only in the Comprehension section were the gains significantly different. In this skill, the experimental group achieved a mean gain of 2.7 compared to 0.2 for the control group. The "t" value of 2.42 was significant at the .05 level.

The analysis of covariance was then used to test the significance of the differences in the gain scores for the two groups. The pre-test scores on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test were converted to I.Q. ratings and used as the covariate. As in the "t" tests, the only skill which showed a significant difference between the two groups from February to June, was Comprehension. ($F=4.23$; df 1/71; $p<0.05$) The other F values, (Speed and Accuracy, 0.86; Vocabulary, 0.31; and Total Score, 2.16) for 1/71 degrees of freedom, were not significant at the .05 level of confidence.

Oral English

The beneficial effect of the Oral English program on the students in English Communications classes is evident in Figure 8. Seventeen out of the

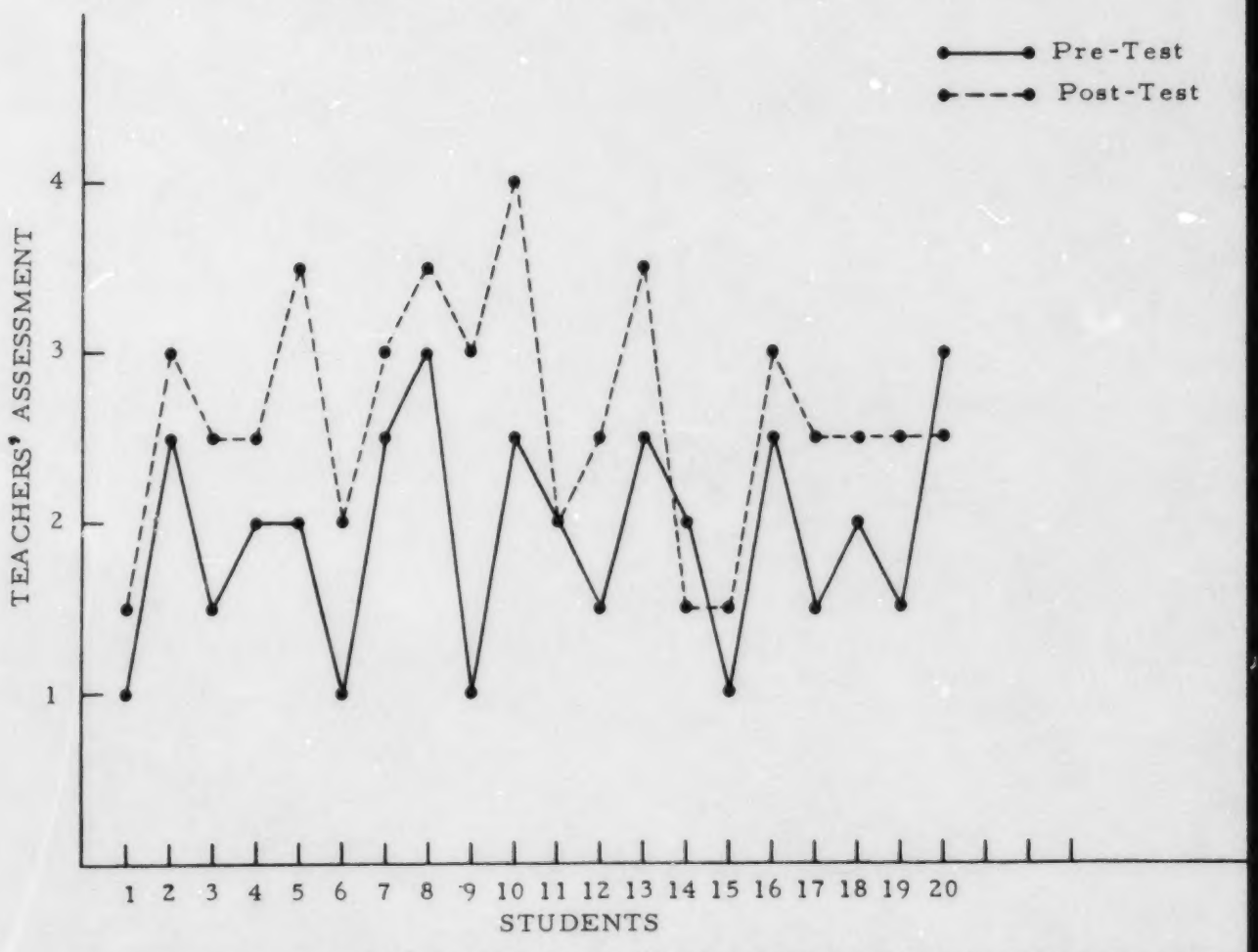


FIGURE 8: PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST RESULTS IN ORAL ENGLISH MADE BY STUDENTS IN THE BRITANNIA EXPERIMENTAL GROUP.

(Graphs were constructed by Lynne Murdoch.)

twenty randomly selected students used in this aspect of the study improved their rating on the post-test. Of the remaining three students, one had the same score as he had on the pre-test and the other two students dropped their rating by only 0. 5 on the post-test.

Students in the control group at Templeton School, however, did not perform nearly as well. Only eleven students out of the twenty-six registered a higher post-test score than they had on the pre-test. (See Figure 9)

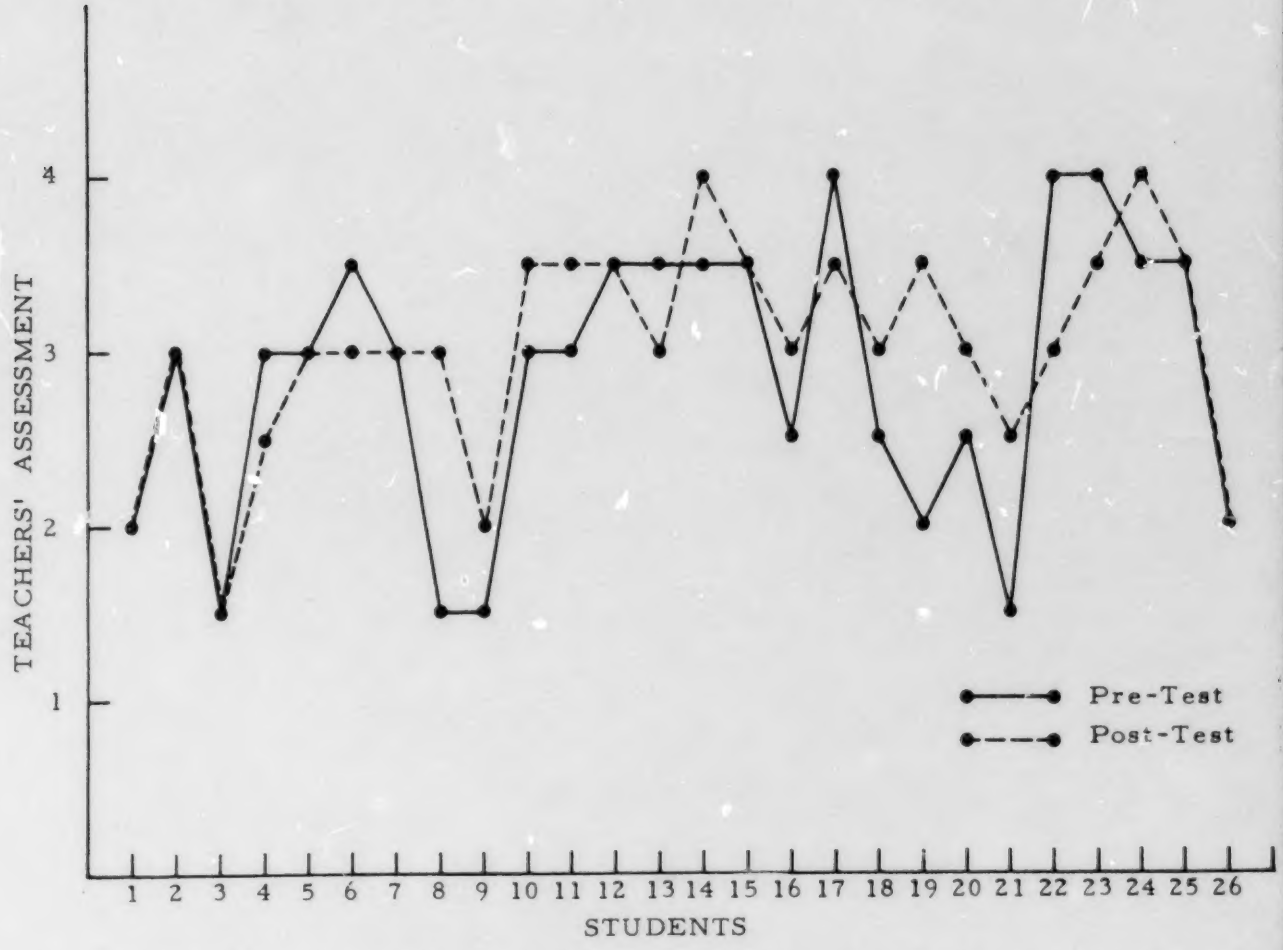


FIGURE 9: PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST RESULTS IN ORAL ENGLISH MADE BY STUDENTS IN THE CONTROL (TEMPLETON) GROUP.

A statistical "t" test was made on the difference between the mean gain scores in Oral English for the experimental group and the control group. (See Table III) The results indicated that the experimental group had performed considerably better than the control group and that the difference was statistically significant. ($t = 2.91$, $p < .01$).

TABLE III: ANALYSIS BY "t" TEST OF GAINS IN ORAL ENGLISH MADE BY THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP (BRITANNIA) AND THE CONTROL GROUP (TEMPLETON).

	Britannia Experimental Group	Templeton Control Group
Number of Pupils	20	26
Pre-Test Mean	1.93	2.85
Post-Test Mean	2.63	3.02
Mean Gain	0.70	0.17
Standard Deviation	0.69	0.59
Difference Between Means	0.53	
"t" Value	2.91**	

** Significant at the .01 level.

Written English

The results of the pre- and post-testing in Written English for the experimental group are presented in Figure 10. All of the twenty experimental students either showed a gain in performance or received the same rating as the one they had obtained in the pre-test. The results imply that these students were benefitting from the treatment they were receiving in the Communications Program.

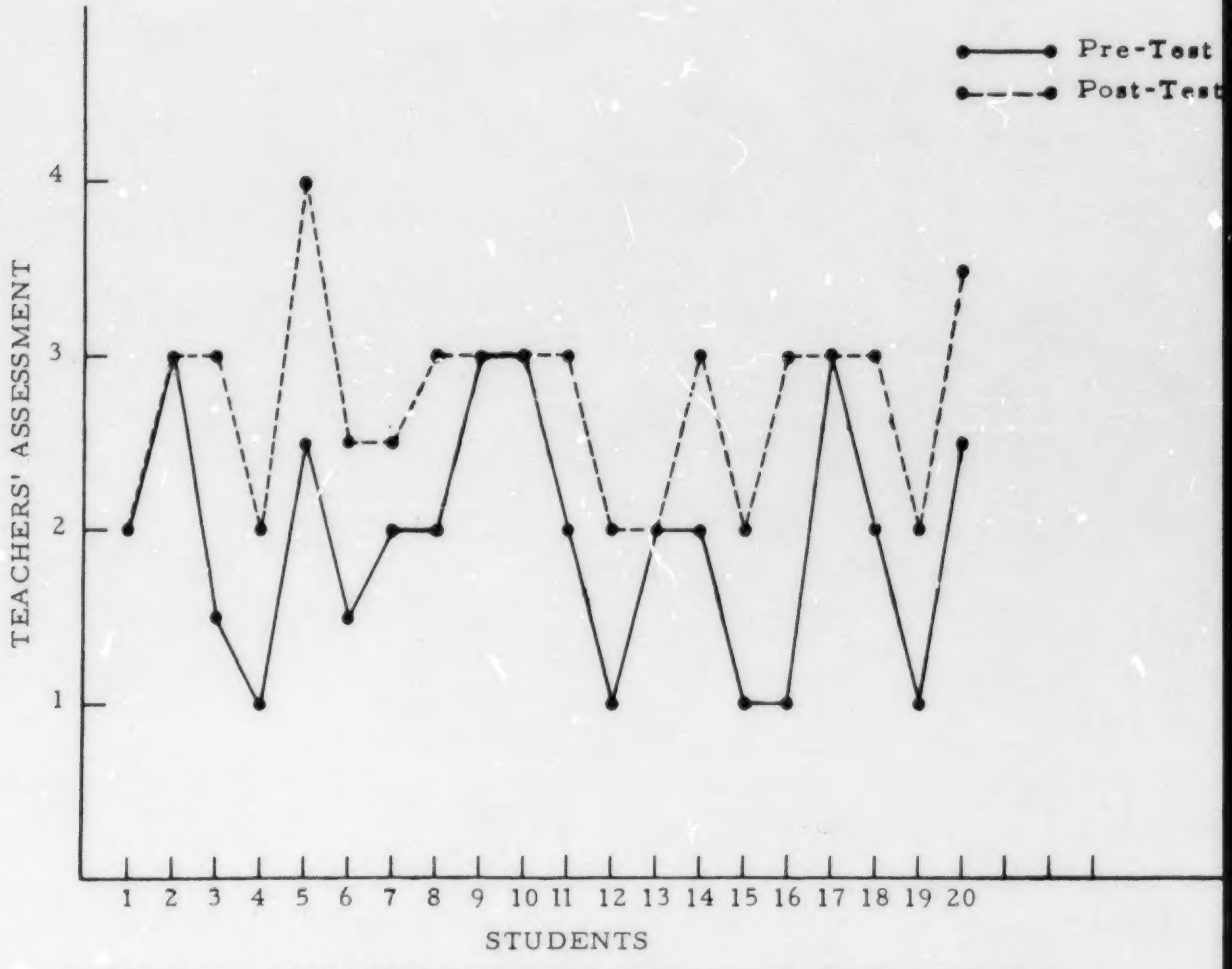


FIGURE 10: PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST RESULTS IN WRITTEN ENGLISH MADE BY THE BRITANNIA EXPERIMENTAL GROUP.

The performance of the control group was, once again, far less impressive. Only five out of the twenty-six control students managed to improve their rating on the post-test. (See Figure 11)

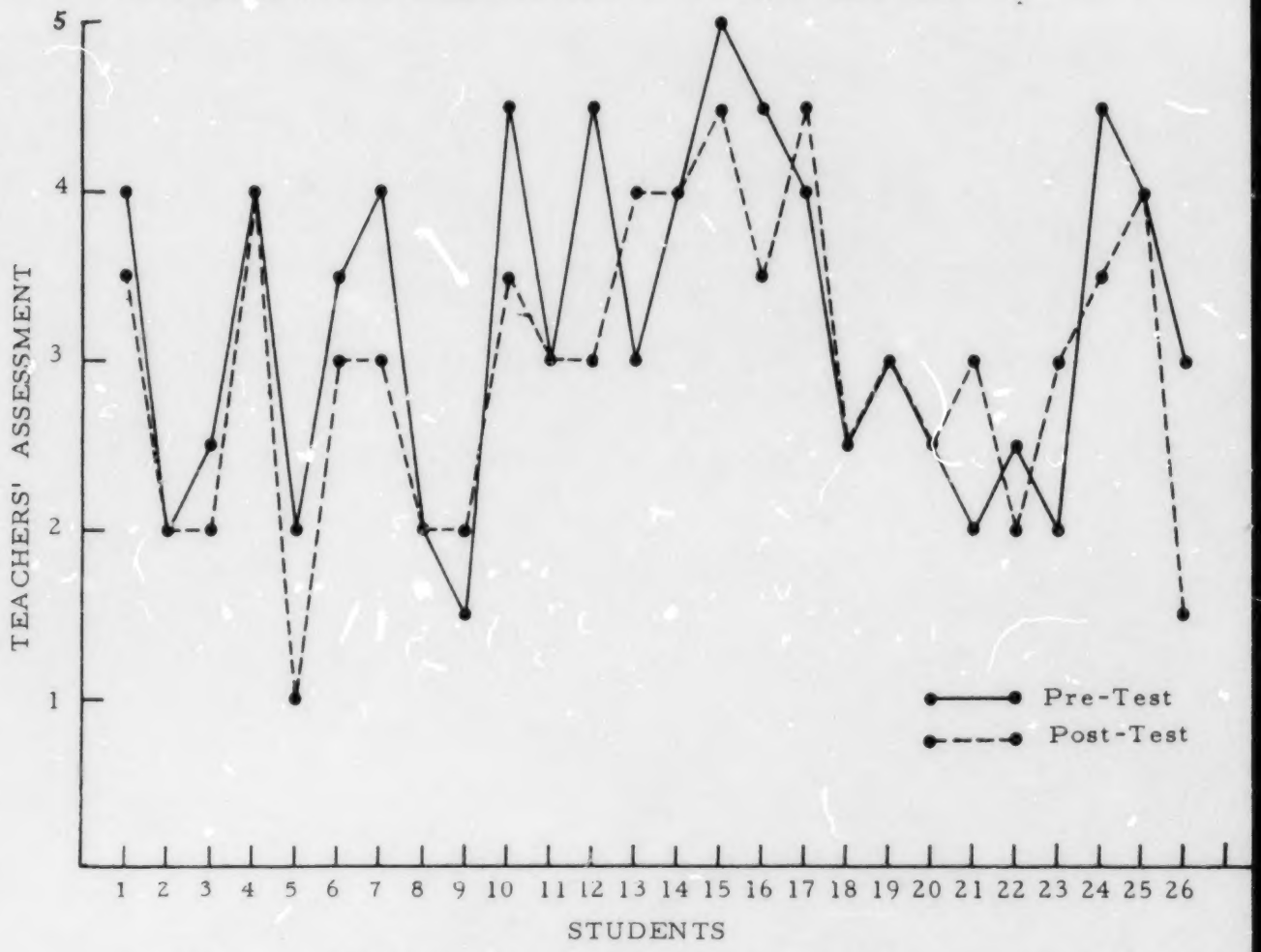


FIGURE 11: PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST RESULTS IN WRITTEN ENGLISH MADE BY THE CONTROL (TEMPLETON) GROUP.

As a result the mean gain score for the control group was -0.25.

Table IV presents the results of the "t" test conducted on the difference between the mean gain scores for the experimental and control group in Written English. The "t" value was 5.32 which was statistically significant at the .01 level.

TABLE IV: ANALYSIS BY "t" TEST OF GAINS IN WRITTEN ENGLISH MADE BY THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP (BRITANNIA) AND THE CONTROL GROUP (TEMPLETON).

	Britannia Experimental Group	Templeton Control Group
Number of Pupils	20	26
Pre-Test Mean	1.95	3.23
Post-Test Mean	2.73	2.98
Mean Gain	0.78	-0.25
Standard Deviation	0.58	0.70
Difference Between Means	1.03	
"t" Value	5.32 **	

** Significant at the .01 level.

B. Subjective Evaluation

A number of staff members and students of Britannia Secondary School commented on the work of the Communications Program. All comments were favourable and a selection of these opinions is presented in the following section.

Staff

"Our Communications classes have up-graded the English skills of many ... students ... I feel these classes are an essential part of the Britannia program". (N. H. Brown, Principal)

"Communication classes accomplish their purpose to allow students to progress in another language with confidence and a reasonable degree of success."

"If Alice is an example of the work of the program, I would say the program is successful."

"I feel that the New Canadian English program is very effective in helping our students."

"I think the program is proving to be very effective."

"The (English) Communications Program has become an essential part of the English course at Britannia."

"This program has provided valuable service to Britannia students."

Students

"90% of the course helped me."

"Everything that I learned helped me a lot."

"There shouldn't be anything removed from the course; maybe there should be something added to it."

"Almost everything helped me, because most of the things I didn't know."

C. Summary of Findings

The beneficial effects of the Communications Program were most evident in the speaking and writing skills. Gains in the mean scores from February to June for both tests were statistically significant at the .01 level.

The results of the listening and reading tests were not as conclusive. There was a significant gain in the comprehension skill subtests, but not in the other reading subtests, nor in the listening test.

Comments by the staff and students concerning the contribution made by the Communications Program were highly favourable.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The results of the study indicated that the Communications Program was having a beneficial effect on the students enrolled. The group recorded gains in most aspects of the tests. In Comprehension, Oral English and Written English the gains were statistically significant.

The English Communications students showed most improvement in the spoken and written aspects of English. These areas were assessed on an individual basis and the results could indicate the need to develop alternate methods of administering survey type tests to students in a remedial English program. Careful checking by independent judges at the Vancouver School Board ensured that 'teacher bias' was not a determining factor in this regard.

A considerable amount of subjective support for the work of the Communications Program was offered by both the staff at the school and the students themselves. (See Yu, 1973, pp. 12-23). Students were asking to be included in the program. There was a more positive attitude to the work of Mrs. Yu and the other teachers of English Communications classes than had existed at the beginning of the program.

The improvement in students' attitudes towards learning which is inferred in the Subjective Evaluation by students and teachers, plus the sound growth in the students' cognitive abilities are both indicative of the merits of the Communications Program. The results also reflect the dedication and skill of Mrs. Yu and the rest of the staff involved with the program at Britannia Secondary School.

Recommendations

The results of the study suggest several recommendations for both the Communications Program and for future research.

(a) The Communications Program

1. An examination could be made of the segment of the program dealing with listening skills to determine if modifications in teaching technique would improve the listening abilities of students.
2. Instructional materials being used in the program could be analyzed to ascertain their interest level and readability level. These results could then be related to the reading needs of the students concerned.

(b) Future Research

Recommendations for future research studies included the following:

1. A longitudinal study to determine the developmental nature of the program from grade to grade.
2. A follow-up survey to elicit practical suggestions from ex-students of the school who had previously taken the program.
3. The use of an instrument to obtain attitudinal changes in students enrolled in the program.
4. The use of more objective measures in evaluating oral and written skills.
5. All survey type tests to be administered to small groups of students instead of the mass testing arrangement used in the study.
6. A comparative analysis of the program offered at Britannia Secondary School and the programs offered at other secondary schools (that also have New Canadian students) to provide a source of information for future use.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

BRITANNIA SECONDARY SCHOOL

Write a paragraph on one of the following topics.

1. An Exciting Experience
2. My Best Friend
3. Hong Kong
4. My Favourite Television Programme
5. Stanley Park
6. A Good Book
7. My Favourite Sport
8. An Interesting Animal
9. A Good Hobby
10. Cars
11. A Day At The Beach
12. Holidays
13. Schools in Hong Kong

APPENDIX B

STUDENT SURVEY

NAME: _____ SEX: M or F (circle)
(Last) (First)

Home Address: _____

School: _____

		Year	Month	Day
Grade: _____	Date:	_____	_____	_____
	Born:	_____	_____	_____
	Age:	_____	_____	_____

English level: 8 9 10 11 12
(Communications) (circle)

Language spoken at home: _____

Number of years you have lived in Canada: _____

Other languages you speak: _____

Your favourite subject: _____

	Pre	Post
Listening:		
Speaking:		
Reading:		
Writing:		

APPENDIX C

ORAL ENGLISH EVALUATION

NAME: _____ SCHOOL: _____

GRADE: _____ SEX: M F (circle)

ADDRESS: _____

	Year	Month	Day
Date:	_____	_____	_____
Born:	_____	_____	_____
Age:	_____	_____	_____

TEACHER: _____

PROCEDURE:

1. Interview students individually.
2. Place artifacts and pictures on the table/desk.
3. Give student time to become settled and relaxed.
4. Ask the student to select any <u>one</u> artifact or picture and tell you about it.
5. Encourage the student to continue talking for several minutes (no longer than 5 minutes). If necessary ask questions about the item he or she has selected.

Fluency of expression rating: 1 2 3 4 5